

# Transforming Washington Communities

## Skagit County Community Transformation Grant Success Story

### Healthy changes in the Concrete School District:

Skagit County's United General District 304 | Community Health Outreach Programs (CHOP) saw opportunities to improve nutrition environments and increase access to healthy foods in the Concrete School District. Community feedback ranged from, "Access to healthy foods?! Kids don't like vegetables!" to, "The way to develop healthy eating habits in kids is to work within the schools. Get them while they're still learning." With those words of community wisdom, and with a number of local champions eager to assist, the Healthy Community and Schools Initiative took its first steps.

The Concrete School District is a Title 1 district serving Skagit County's low-income eastern communities. Its 550 students live in an area abundant with small farms, orchards, and ranches, yet this part of the county is a rural food desert with just one full-service grocery store serving the community's 4,840 residents. Working closely with the Superintendent of area schools and a Wellness Advisory Team of teachers, staff, parents, and community members, CHOP utilized the Community Transformation Grant (CTG) funding and leveraged additional resources to build a strong foundation of policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve student health. Successes include:

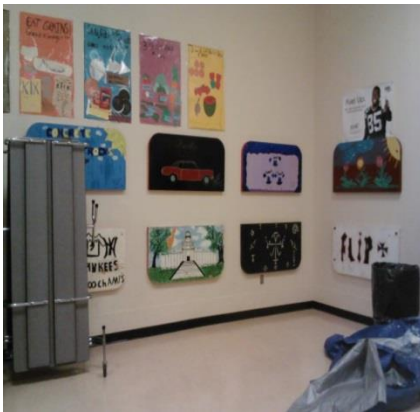
- Updating district's wellness policy:
  - The new policy reflects best practices and includes model language on preferential purchasing of local farm products for school meals, providing adequate time for students to eat, not allowing recess to be withheld as a form of punishment, and avoiding the use of sweets for classroom rewards.
- Systems changes that encourage healthy lifestyles:
  - We increased knowledge, skills, and confidence of food service staff to use fresh produce in meals. This was accomplished through coordinated trainings.
  - We expanded the range of fruit and vegetable options by conducting recipe trials with food services staff and taste tests with students.
  - We implemented Cornell University Smarter Lunchroom Strategies.
  - Students go on more field trips to local farms through the Farm to School program. We are partnering with the district on a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm to School grants for this project.
  - We piloted Skagit County's first Electronic Benefit Transfer incentive program, which is being offered at



Transplanting Corn at Cascadian Farm

four markets in 2014. This was made possible by our 2013 partnership with Sedro-Woolley Farmers Market and the Food Access Coalition, which engaged partners to increase access to healthy foods.

- We provided 75 first through sixth graders with summer meals, literacy, and enrichment during summer break. This program was called the Concrete Summer Learning Adventure.
- Environmental Change:
  - Coordinating high school Job Corps volunteers for 'Lunchroom Makeovers' at Concrete Elementary and High School.
  - Working with Concrete Summer Learning Adventure students to design, paint, and install fruit and vegetable murals in the elementary school lunchroom. This project was so beloved that one 6<sup>th</sup> grade boy declared, "I'm going to sit facing my cauliflower every day!" (He'll probably eat his veggies too.)



Before



After

These efforts were funded in part by the Community Transformation Grant and the Affordable Care Act. They have been an important catalyst for policy, systems, and environmental changes in Skagit County. United General District 304 | Community Health Outreach Programs will sustain and build on these changes in the Concrete School District and in additional communities and schools.